

Date:08/15/92

Page:1

JFK ASSASSINATION SYSTEM

IDENTIFICATION FORM

AGENCY INFORMATION

AGENCY : SSCIA
RECORD NUMBER : 157-10011-10018

RECORDS SERIES :

AGENCY FILE NUMBER :

DOCUMENT INFORMATION

ORIGINATOR : SSCIA
FROM :
TO :

TITLE :
SSCI TRANSCRIPT DATED JUNE 11, 1975, TESTIMONY OF RICHARD M. BISSELL

DATE : 06/11/75
PAGES : 135

SUBJECTS :
TRANSCRIPT, TESTIMONY OF RICHARD M. BISSELL

DOCUMENT TYPE : PAPER, TEXTUAL DOCUMENT
CLASSIFICATION : T
RESTRICTIONS : REFERRED
CURRENT STATUS : P
DATE OF LAST REVIEW : 09/29/93

OPENING CRITERIA :

COMMENTS :
SSCI Box 231, Folder 5, Testimony of Richard Bissell

[R] - ITEM IS RESTRICTED

TOP SECRET

1 to reactivate the operation, to renew the attempt, until
2 after I had left the Agency, which was in February 1962.

3 Senator Mondale. Now, you say you discussed probably
4 with Bundy and Rostow the capability in developing more
5 capability of assassinations. And you may have discussed
6 it in the context of various potential targets without
7 deciding on them. Once you decided on a target, or you were
8 going to recommend a target, what was the process of getting
9 clearance?

10 Mr. Bissell. I can't answer you that, simply because
11 no specific target was ever recommended. And to the best
12 of my knowledge and belief, other than the case we have discussed
13 at length of Castro, which in time preceded the SRRIFLE pro-
14 ject. The issue of obtaining clearance never arose. I
15 can speculate on how that would have worked if you wish.

16 Senator Mondale. No.

17 The Chairman. Let's go ahead then with the questions.

18 Mr. Schwarz. Senator Baker asked, did Helms succeed you?

19 Mr. Bissell. That is correct.

20 Mr. Schwarz. Did you turn over SRRIFLE to him and
21 did you tell him about it?

22 Mr. Bissell. I believe I did. And I also believe
23 that Mr. Harvey told him about it promptly after the turnover.

24 Mr. Schwarz. Do you know a man called Justin O'Donnell?

25 Mr. Bissell. Yes, I do.

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

1 Mr. Schwarz. Did you ask him in words or substance to
2 kill Mr. Lumumba?

3 Mr. Bissell. I asked him to investigate the possibility
4 and to make explanation for so doing.

5 Mr. Schwarz. When did you do that?

6 Mr. Bissell. I don't remember the date of that. I may
7 have it on a chronology here, but I imagine that is a matter
8 of record, or that he has testified to that date. I don't
9 remember the date.

10 Mr. Schwarz. Did you tell him this connection with
11 making plans to go see the passer of the poison, Mr. Gottlieb?

12 Mr. Bissell. I think I probably did.

13 Mr. Schwarz. Did he tell you he wouldn't do it?

14 Mr. Bissell. Later he told me that he didn't want to
15 do it. But he also said that he thought it was an inappro-
16 priate action, and that the desired object could be accom-
17 plished better in other ways.

18 Mr. Schwarz. Who authorized you to tell Mr. O'Donnell
19 to take steps to move toward assassinating Mr. Lumumba?

20 Mr. Bissell. Nobody.

21 Mr. Schwarz. Did you inform the White House of that?

22 Mr. Bissell. No.

23 Mr. Schwarz. To the best of your knowledge, did anybody
24 inform the White House of that?

25 Mr. Bissell. To the best of my knowledge, no.

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

1 Mr. Schwarz. Why did you seek to assassinate Mr.
2 Lumumba?

3 Mr. Bissell. I didn't seek to assassinate him. I
4 told a member of the clandestine service to make plans and
5 develop the capability so to do if it were approved and
6 ordered.

7 Senator Goldwater. Approved by who?

8 Mr. Bissell. It would have then had to have approval
9 at the highest level of government.

10 The Chairman. Where did the idea come from?

11 Mr. Bissell. I don't remember, Mr. Chairman. It could
12 possibly have been mine.

13 The Chairman. It could possibly have been yours?

14 Mr. Schwarz. Did you tell Rostow that was your initiative?

15 Mr. Bissell. I told him that the instruction as to
16 O'Donnell was my initiative.

17 Senator Baker. How many others did you plan on, just
18 as a contingency?

19 How many other people did you instruct to draw up plans
20 to assassinate?

21 Mr. Bissell. I don't believe there were any others which
22 went to the point of instructing that a man be prepared.

23 Senator Baker. How many were there that didn't go that
24 far? How many murders did you contemplate?

25 Mr. Bissell. Well, Senator --

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

1 quoting a cable concerning the asset WIROGUE, who was sent
2 to the Congo in the fall of 1960.

3 The Chairman. Mr. Bissell, the memorandum to which
4 counsel has referred reads as follows:

5 "In recommending the agent or asset ROGUE, the Chief
6 of Station, Leopoldville, the Chief of the Agency's African
7 Division, probably Bronson Tweedy, wrote in late 1960:

8 'He is indeed aware of the precepts of right and wrong,
9 but if he is given an assignment, which may be morally wrong
10 in the eyes of the world, but necessary because his case offi-
11 cer ordered him to carry it out, then it is right, and he
12 will dutifully undertake appropriate action for its execution
13 without pangs of conscience. In a word, he can rationalize
14 all actions'".

15 Is that fairly representative of the philosophy that
16 applied to such matters at the time?

17 Mr. Bissell. Well, it certainly applied within the
18 range of matters that would have come under SRRIFLE.

19 Could I say, Mr. Chairman, that I know of no way in
20 which it is possible to operate a secret intelligence agency
21 or a secret service unless it has at least a number of
22 employees who are willing to and can be depended upon to
23 carry out orders involving acts of this sort.

24 The Chairman. That assumes, of course, that the
25 United States ought to assassinate foreign leaders.

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

Phone (Area 202) 544-6000

WARD & PAUL

410 First Street, S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003

1 meant to suggest that that was entirely comparable?

2 Mr. Bissell. It was not meant to suggest that it was
3 entirely comparable, but the individual whom I have mentioned
4 were all perceived in their time and place as menaces to
5 their own countries and the U.S. interests.

6 Senator Goldwater. Might I ask a question based on his
7 experience?

8 From my readings in trying to learn more about intelli-
9 gence, I gathered the impression that the actions such as
10 you have been describing up to and including assassination,
11 are practiced by every intelligence organization that I have
12 been studying, is that correct?

13 Mr. Bissell. That is my impression likewise, Senator.

14 Senator Goldwater. Including England?

15 Mr. Bissell. I believe so. In fact, I think definitely
16 it has been used by M16. I couldn't give you specific
17 cases.

18 Senator Goldwater. Certainly KGB.

19 Mr. Bissell. Certainly the KGB -- although as, the Chair-
20 man pointed out the other day, I at least cannot point to
21 any case where the KGB has carried out the assassination of
22 a chief of state.

23 Senator Goldwater. Would you assume that in the cases
24 of those other countries that this ruler would have knowledge
25 of this in every case?

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

Phone (Area 202) 544-6000

1 Mr. Bissell. In the case specifically of the U.K.,
2 I would answer in the affirmative. I also believe, however,
3 that the Chief of the Intelligence Service of any one of those
4 countries would flatly deny that the chief of state had
5 knowledge of such action.

6 Senator Goldwater. Thank you.

7 Senator Baker. Would you deny it?

8 Mr. Bissell. In our case here?

9 Senator Baker. Yes, sir.

10 Mr. Bissell. Yes, it would be appropriate to do so.

11 Senator Baker. Have you done so?

12 Mr. Bissell. I have not had occasion to, because I am
13 unaware of any high level assassination that occurred by
14 the U.S.

15 Senator Baker. Doesn't that amount to a denial?

16 Mr. Bissell. It is a denial that any has occurred,
17 at least in the period that I am aware of.

18 Mr. Schwarz. Was your answer to Senator Baker meant to
19 indicate that you would perjure yourself on this matter?

20 Mr. Bissell. It depends a little bit on the context.
21 There are occasions when I would go a long way to protect the
22 President of the United States from certain kinds of embarrass-
23 ment.

24 Senator Baker. The question was, very simply, would
25 you try to protect the President in such a case as you des-

410 First Street, S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003

WARD & PAUL

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

1 cribed, MI6 or otherwise?

2 Mr. Bissell. I can conceive of so doing, Senator.

3 Senator Tower. May I pursue that just a moment further?

4 You might say one thing in sworn testimony before a
5 committee like this, but say another thing publicly, is that
6 what you mean?

7 Mr. Bissell. That is exactly what I mean.

8 The Chairman. Have you lied to this committee?

9 Mr. Bissell. No, sir.

10 The Chairman. Would you lie to this committee?

11 Mr. Bissell. No, sir.

12 Senator Tower. I think that distinction has to be made.
13 I think I would have lied about the U-2 myself.

14 The Chairman. Shall we proceed with the questions?

15 Mr. Schwarz. The remaining topic I have is Trujillo.
16 It is respectfully indicated, and involves a lot of documents.
17 And we have some procedural matters that we need to take up.
18 I know we can't finish Trujillo before 12:30, and I would
19 suggest that we ask the witness and whatever Senators that
20 can return to come back this afternoon on Trujillo.

21 The Chairman. We have a Senate order that there will
22 be no further committee meetings this afternoon.

23 I doubt that we can obtain unanimous consent.
24
25

TOP SECRET

1 almost any kind of paramilitary operation, such as the
2 ~~Guatamallan~~ operation, the Bay of Pigs itself is, the earlier
3 operation that has been discussed in the press ~~in Iran, and~~
4 ~~which resulted in the ouster of Mossadegh and the return of the~~
5 ~~Shah~~, there is an expectation that such operations will involve
6 military or semimilitary action, and that some people will lose
7 their lives in the process.

8 Senator Baker. Yes, but I am speaking rather more
9 precisely of a single person or a group of people ~~who were~~
10 targeted, or discussions were held ~~about targeting them~~, for
11 what would be an assassination were it not for the legal
12 significance of the term.

13 Mr. Bissell. I don't think I remember any cases in
14 which that sort of matter was discussed or was the subject
15 of planning, other than the ones which have already been
16 mentioned in testimony.

17 Senator Mathias. Could I interject a question at this
18 point.

19 But of course that contemplates what we have seen in
20 the earlier testimony, that when you begin an operation --
21 and I think this was the history of the Castro operation --
22 to in some way incapacitate him politically, that it often
23 moves to the extreme of incapacitating him physically, isn't
24 that true?

25 Mr. Bissell. That is correct, sir.

TOP SECRET

81

AFTERNOON SESSION

2:17

TESTIMONY OF RICHARD M. BISSELL (CON'D)

The Chairman. The hearing will come to order.

Mr. Schwarz will commence the questioning.

It will be understood that the oath still continues to apply.

Mr. Schwarz. Before we turn to Trujillo, two quick questions. On the subject of Sukarno, were you involved in the making of the movie in which an actor was made up to look like Sukarno, and he engaged in sexual activity, with the proposal, the plan, being that that movie would be released in Indonesia?

Mr. Bissell. I have no recollection of that.

Mr. Schwarz. And if I took out any of the details and broke it apart you would have no recollection?

Mr. Bissell. I am afraid not.

Mr. Schwarz. And the second thing, to pin down on Mr. Helms, did you brief him about the Mafia matter?

Mr. Bissell. I am reasonably clear that I did not brief him in the early stages, that is to say, in 1960. And my impression is that he may very well not have been briefed on it until I was about to leave the Agency in early 1962.

Mr. Schwarz. But at that point you did brief him?

Mr. Bissell. I don't remember whether I personally

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

89

1 they might eventually be so used.

2 Mr. Schwarz. Is that a supposition, or is it based upon
3 any recollection?

4 Mr. Bissell. I would say it is a faint recollection.
5 But I find it very difficult in this case to distinguish
6 between an element of supposition and a dim recollection.

7 Let me come to what I seem to remember about this matter.
8 There was, as you have already indicated, several discussions
9 in the Special Group, and one or more at least in other very
10 small groups with representation from State, the White House
11 and the Agency. And I am clear -- I do recollect that the
12 plans at that time contemplated the arming of obviously a
13 relatively small group inside the Dominican Republic, that is,
14 the provision of arms perhaps for a dozen or so people, but
15 not for something like a Bay of Pigs invasion or a major
16 geurilla activity.

17 Now, in discussing that kind of an operation, I am
18 perfectly certain that everyone that participated in the
19 discussion was clear that weapons so supplied might very well
20 be used against Trujillo or other senior supporters of his.

21 Mr. Schwarz. For how many countries in your experience
22 at the CIA has the US Government supplied arms to dissident
23 groups within the country?

24 Mr. Bissell. Well, we have talked about two cases;

25 is another case during the time I was in the Agency,

TOP SECRET

Phone (Area 202) 544-6000

WARD & PAUL

410 First Street, S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003

TOP SECRET

90

Phone (Area 202) 544-6000

1 or before I was DDP. Off hand I can't remember other cases,
2 but there may have been some. Well, earlier before I was ever
3 in the Agency, there was the case of Iran. And there was the
4 reasonably well publicized case of Guatamala.

5 Mr. Schwarz. And the Iron Curtain countries?

6 Mr. Bissell. I think we have.

7 Mr. Schwarz. But what I am driving at, it is fairly
8 common to supply arms to dissident elements in countries all
9 over the world?

10 Mr. Bissell. Yes, that is correct.

11 Mr. Schwarz. Does taht also imply that there is an
12 assassination contemplated or not?

13 Mr. Bissell. I would say definitely not, in most cases
14 not. In a large scale operation like Guatamala there was
15 no intention of any assassination. I think you would include
16 it under that term.

17 The same is true in Iran of course -- the possibility
18 that a chief of state would be killed.

19 The Chairman. But you would distinguish this matter from
20 just supplying of arms to dissidents? In other words, there
21 was an element of knowledge here that the arms were supplied
22 for a purpose, and that that purpose might well be the assassi-
23 nation of Trujillo or other highly placed people in this
24 Government, correct?

25 Mr. Bissell. The way I would prefer to state it, Senator,

TOP SECRET

410 First Street, S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003

WARD & PAUL

TOP SECRET

91

1 I think is basically consistent with what you said. I would
2 say that in the planning of this operation, and in the approval
3 process, those involved would probably have given a higher
4 probability to such use being made of the weapons than they
5 would in some of the other operations that I have referred to.

6 Mr. Schwarz. However, just focusing on the Special
7 Group as of the 12th of January, you can't tell from the
8 minutes which state of mind existed, but you have a faint
9 recollection that the more targeted state of mind existed as of
10 the 12th of January?

11 Mr. Bissell. My impression is that as of that time, as
12 I mentioned at the end of the testimony this morning, the
13 reason that the State Department, and probably the Agency's
14 representatives in the Special Group, favored this group was
15 a pragmatic reason. It was to maintain and strengthen political
16 ties with the dissidents.

17 Mr. Schwarz. The next matter of record that we should
18 focus on is a memorandum of January 25, 1961, apparently
19 reflecting a discussion of **Project EMDEED**. Was **EMDEED** the
20 code for the overthrow of Trujillo?

21 Mr. Bissell. I suspect it was the code name for the
22 project of support to the dissidents.

23 Mr. Schwarz. Do you remember the name **EMSTEW**?

24 I show you the memorandum of January 24, 1961 headed
25 "Discussion of **Project EMDEED**." Does it appear to be a

TOP SECRET

Phone (Area 202) 544-6000

WARD & PAUL

410 First Street, S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003

TOP SECRET

107

Phone (Area 202) 544-6000

WARD & PAUL

410 First Street, S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003

1 and this record, which is a record we have obtained from
2 the Agency, may be unfair to you. But do you not agree
3 that on this record it appears that on the item of the pass-
4 ing of the weapons which were the weapons that were in fact
5 used, it appears that the Agency elected to keep the State
6 Department uninformed on that item?

7 Mr. Bissell. No, sir, it does not quite appear that way.
8 It appears -- if I put these two together --

9 Mr. Schwarz. By these two you mean your cable of March
10 24 and the cable of May 1 relating to certain matters is
11 not to be discussed with the State Department?

12 Mr. Bissell. Yes. The earlier cable of those refers to
13 machine guns.

14 Mr. Schwarz. And to the pouching of revolvers?

15 Mr. Bissell. And the pouching of revolvers. And
16 I believe that what eventually passed to the dissidents
17 were three rifles, not the revolvers. And, therefore, neither
18 of these cables in fact refers to the passage to the dissi-
19 dents [REDACTED]

20 This cable states the conditional willingness at some
21 time in the future to pass machine guns. That permission
22 was never granted and they were never passed.

23 It refers to pouching revolvers. And I don't
24 know whether there was a record that those were ever passed,
25 or even intended to be passed, to the dissidents. And it would

TOP SECRET